



**merlin standard**

**2018**

**ROYAL BRITISH LEGION INDUSTRIES**

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## 1. KEY INFORMATION

Assessment Type	INITIAL ASSESSMENT
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET
Anniversary Date	26/04/2020
Assessment Dates	25/04/2018 – 26/04/2018
Lead Assessor's Name	LORNA BAINBRIDGE
Customer ID	C23237
Assessment Reference	PN103480

## 2. ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

<b>OVERALL OUTCOME</b>	<b>62% Satisfactory</b>
1. Design	60% Satisfactory
2. Procure	67% Satisfactory
3. Contract	60% Satisfactory
4. Fund	60% Satisfactory
5. Develop	60% Satisfactory
6. Performance Manage	57% Satisfactory
7. Quality Assurance and Compliance	70% Good
8. Review and Close	64% Satisfactory

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Royal British Legion Industries (referred to as RBLI or the Organisation throughout the report) is mandated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be assessed and subsequently accredited against the Merlin Standard. This is due to being a delivery Partner (Prime) for the Access to Work. The Organisation is also a Prime provider for the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) contract whereby a supply chain has been designed to support the delivery of the service, and as a result this was included in the scope of the assessment.

The assessment team comprised of Lorna Bainbridge (Lead Assessor) and Christine Smart (Team Assessor) supported by a coordinator from within RBLI. The Lead Assessor started to work with the coordinator in February 2018 to establish the scope and discuss the logistics of the assessment. The dates for the on-site were identified and a plan of action agreed.

A booking form was submitted to Assessment Services Limited along with a spread-sheet indicating a full list of Partners.

The Lead Assessor liaised with the coordinator prior to the on-site activity to review the schedule and logistics. All documentation required for the assessment; Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and schedule were shared in line with the agreed timescales to enable the assessment to take place as planned.

The assessment team spent a total of one day each reviewing documentary evidence and undertaking interviews with RBLI staff involved in the strategic and day-to-day management of the supply chains. 100% of the Partners across both Access to Work and BBO programmes were interviewed.

The following report provides an indication of the findings against all the criteria within the Merlin Standard, which was evidenced across the supply chains, as well as areas of strength and areas to consider for development and significant improvement over the forthcoming two-years.

## 4. ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

RBLI is a Charity with a clear purpose *'to improve lives every day, supporting the Armed Forces Community, people with disabilities and health conditions, and people who are out of work to become independent and create a more positive future'*.

The Organisation started in 1919, when soldiers were leaving the battlefield fighting tuberculosis; over 55,000 were discharged from the service with the disease and gained support from RBLI. In 1920, it started to provide accommodation, developing the village ideology, and healthcare, and training and employment service started to be provided. Subsequently, over the years the services have continued to evolve as new accommodation has been added to its portfolio, and access to funding has resulted in additional services for men and women, and their families.

RBLI accesses funding to deliver a range of programmes in order to contribute to its overarching purpose. It works with different commissioners, for example, DWP, Big Lottery to deliver the Access to Work and BBO programmes, as well as European Social Funding (ESF), Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). It also works with other Prime Contractors such as Reed in Partnership and Skills Training (UK) Ltd to deliver other programmes, relating to the welfare to work and skills agendas.

In order to meet the requirements of the commissioners, address customer's needs and in the case of the BBO programme to contribute to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) priorities RBLI have designed supply chains to deliver specific services. The following provides an indication of the breakdown between direct delivery and supply chain for the current contracts:

Access to Work - RBLI directly delivers around 60% of the assessments with Right to Write delivering approximately 30% across the North of England and Momentum and 3SC delivering 5% each across Scotland and Wales respectively.

BBO – in one area RBLI deliver 72% with the supply chain comprising of three other Partners delivering 28%, whilst in the other area direct delivery is 56% and 44% delivered by two Partners.

## 5. AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH

A number of significant strengths were identified during the Assessment and these are described below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

RBLI has a clear mission, which is underpinned with a set of core values, whilst consideration was made to public, private and third sector organisations, RBLI opted to work with a higher percentage of those from the third sector. The rationale was to ensure they were working together towards a common purpose and with similar values. Reference was made to open communications relating to the purpose and values of RBLI by some Partners (interviewees involved in the design and procurement stages) to review and ensure they were aligned to those of the Prime prior to contract award. There was a clear commitment to equality and diversity from RBLI as well as Partners with a focus on moving people with disabilities into the employment space. (1.5)

A clear strategy to undertake an open and transparent approach to procurement was designed. The opportunity to partner RBLI was promoted through a range of methods, and the Expression of Interest (EOI) provided information regarding RBLI and the aims and objectives of the programme, as well as an outline of the scoring mechanism adopted. Partners (interviewees involved in the procurement stage) confirmed that the process was straight-forward, and support was available, if required. Subsequently, Partners were advised of the outcome and next steps. (2.1)

RBLI engaged in open discussions with Partners to review the funding and payment arrangements to ensure they were fair, proportionate and did not cause financial risk. As a result, different funding models were designed to ensure the contract was somewhat viable for Partners. (4.1)

The approach to performance management has evolved and activities are implemented which are proportionate to the size of the contract. Typically, a weekly telephone call will be conducted with each Partner to review performance, and subsequently a full assessment of performance against profile is undertaken monthly. Partners spoke of been able to talk about challenges and issues, as well as identifying different approaches to work with customers, and positive outcomes being recognised. (6.3)

Policies and procedures to ensure the compliance requirements are met and the quality of the delivery is monitored, including the customer experience have been designed and implemented. Subsequently, any findings are documented and fed back to the Partner and Performance Manager to be addressed within a given period of time. This has contributed to Partners making improvements and ensuring that the documentation / evidence meets the minimum requirements of the commissioners. (7.2)

Clear strategies have been designed and implemented to ensure RBLI and the Partners maintain policies and procedures for data security, health and safety, safeguarding and environmental sustainability. An initial due diligence was undertaken prior to the respective programme going live, and subsequently an annual review of the policies and procedures is undertaken to ensure legislative and regulatory updates are addressed. Annual risk assessments to review data security, health and safety and safeguarding take place, which are reviewed by the lead within RBLI, as well as annual site visits to check the implementation of such policies and procedures. (7.4)

The Partners delivering the BBO programme have targets to achieve relating to equal opportunities, which are based on the priorities of the LEPs. Subsequently, whilst no customer is refused the service, on a quarterly basis performance against these targets are reviewed and action discussed and agreed to promote the service to specific customer groups, for example, opportunities identified to attract 50plus women, male participants, etc. (8.4)

## 6. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Organisation achieved a satisfactory rating for seven of the Merlin principles and good for the remaining principle and consequently met the Standard. Over the past year RBLI has experienced a number of staff changes, which in some cases has resulted in different approaches been adopted, and / or systems and processes been redesigned. A number of areas where further development would be beneficial were identified during the Assessment. These are for the Organisation to consider as a contribution to continuous improvement. The numbers in brackets refer to the principles of the Standard:

RBLI have successfully designed and procured supply chains to support the delivery of the Access to Work and BBO programmes, and subsequently agreed the contracting and funding arrangements with those Partners selected. In the future, a review of the approach, coupled with establishing lessons learnt and good practice will contribute to developing a robust approach to these aspects of partnership working. (1, 2, 3, 4)

Partners were supported and provided with a range of resources to set-up the Programme in the first instance and subsequently have access to learning and development activities throughout the life of the programmes. In the future, consideration could be made to undertaking a formal training needs analysis, address the needs and subsequently evaluate the impact on the delivery of the services. Consideration could also be made to using different approaches to deliver learning and development activities, for example, wider use of technology. (5)

A high proportion of Partners spoke positively regarding their Specific Point of Contact (SPOC), which is the Performance Manager for Access to Work and Project Manager for BBO (future reference is made to Performance Manager for ease of reading). In addition, Partners are aware of others responsible for specific activities, for example, quality assurance and handling of referrals. Trust and confidence between RBLI and the Partners is growing, and as a result, RBLI staff are encouraged to continue to develop strong, positive and supportive relationships to enable Partners to be successful and perform well against the targets and contribute to the overarching aims and objectives of the commissioners. (6)

Access to Work is coming up to the one-year anniversary and as a result RBLI in conjunction with its Partners is encouraged to reflect upon the year; identify strengths and celebrate, as well as establish the areas for improvement to inform further improvements. In addition, as is common practice of RBLI; a social impact report is to be undertaken to establish the impact on the wider social objectives, as well as the positive impact on the different stakeholders; staff, customers, commissioners, etc. and this is encouraged with a focus on the Access to Work and BBO programmes. (6, 7, 8)

Whilst the Organisation has the policies and processes to support Partners deliver the programmes, consideration could be made to designing a Supply Chain Management Framework (SCMF). This could provide a structure, aligned to the Merlin standard, to effectively design and subsequently manage supply chains from start to finish. It would also contribute to the consistency in practices even in the event of staff changes. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)

## 7. AREAS REQUIRING SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT

The following areas were identified as needing improvement as there was limited or insufficient evidence found during the assessment (a score of less than 3). The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard:

RBLI work with Partners to deliver the services in line with the commissioner's aims and objectives, and contractual obligations, as well as ensuring the needs of the customers are addressed. The geographical spread of the Partners creates its challenges and to date has minimised the opportunities for collaborative working across the respective supply chain. In the future, consideration could be made to encouraging greater levels of collaborative working between Partners, which may also contribute to improving performance and sharing practices. (1.4)

Partners delivering the Access to Work programme confirmed their understanding of single unit price payments made to RBLI by DWP, and in turn the amount paid to them for the delivery of services. Consequently, there was an appreciation that a management fee was paid. However, there was a lack of understanding in relation to what the management fee provided to the Partner. In the future, consideration could be made to providing Partners with a list of the resources provided to enable them to deliver the programme, which may raise their awareness regarding what they gain in receipt of paying the management fee. (4.3)

A range of management information reporting mechanisms are used for both Access to Work and BBO to provide data to drive performance and support customer progression, for example, MyWorkSearch and iCan. However, some Partners (interviewees throughout the assessment) appeared not to have gained access to this data, and / or on occasions believe the figures differ to their own. Consequently, consideration could be made to reviewing the recipient of the management information to ensure it is accessible to the appropriate personnel. In addition, it may be timely to review the currency and accuracy of the data provided to ensure it is in real-time and correlates to that of the Partner. (6.4)

On a quarterly basis, a report is submitted to the Big Lottery to indicate performance levels of the supply chain, lessons learnt, and to address equality and diversity and environmental sustainability requirements. This informs actions required of the Partners for the forthcoming quarter. The Access to Work Programme is in the tenth month of delivery, and at the one-year anniversary in June 2018 a full self-assessment report (SAR) is to be generated in conjunction with Partners, which will inform the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). RBLI is encouraged to implement this plan and consider undertaking a similar process for the BBO programme; to review the year and identify areas of strength to be celebrated and those for improvement to inform a QIP, which may contribute to performance improvements and quality assurance practices. (6.7)

## 8. FINDINGS

### PRINCIPLE 1: Design

RBLI had previously been a Prime provider of the Access to Work programme as well as being part of another Primes supply chain. When the most recent tender information was released the commissioner's aims and objectives were clear and indicated a move to Prime organisations delivering a national service, as opposed to one based on Contract Package Area (CPA). RBLI recognised that the programme continued to contribute to its mission and aligned to the current service provision, and as a result opted to tender as a Prime Partner to the DWP, once again.

Once the decision to become a Prime Partner was made, the Organisation started to identify potential Partners and engaged them in initial discussions. Consideration was made to public, private and third sector organisations, however, more importantly, RBLI opted to focus on Partners been aligned to the mission and core values. As a result, it decided that the supply chain would be made up of predominantly third sector. The supply chain, including direct delivery for Access to Work is currently made up of 75% third sector and 25% private. It is a similar situation within the BBO programme with a supply chain of 80% been third sector and 20% private.

Partners delivering the BBO programme are encouraged to use other organisations and agencies from the wider networks at local level in order to meet the needs of customers and the commissioner, as well as the LEPs. RBLI actively use wider networks to deliver the service, for example, customers are signpost to Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Turning Point and other support organisations, agencies and groups. Currently, due to the nature of the Access to Work programme Partners are limited in using wider networks. However, it was noted that assessors delivering the service are constantly updated regarding the latest equipment and technology available on the market and the respective suppliers in order to make appropriate recommendations for customers.

RBLI actively network in specific arenas, for example, it is represented on the Supported Business Steering Group and is an avid promoter of accelerating the agenda to get people with disabilities into the workplace. It champions the agenda with Ministers and seeks to feedback on current service provision and identify gaps in service to further inform changes to services.

RBLI engaged potential Partners in conversations to gain an understanding of their business and service offer including, previous experience and performance, local knowledge and footprint. This contributed to the design of the bid submitted. A Partner comment included: *"Very informal consultation but have worked with them for x years."*

Throughout the life of a programme RBLI consult with Partners regarding systems and processes to contribute to continuous improvement. Recently, there was evidence of a Partner working with the IT department when rolling out the MARs database and online platform to support the delivery of the Access to Work programme. This resulted in changes to make the process easier; allowing the Partner access to specific fields to make changes and enabling access to the contact logs.

The direct delivery team work in collaboration with their Partners providing support; advice and guidance to enable them to deliver the services, meet the aims, objectives and targets, as well as address the customer needs. Whilst RBLI has planned to arrange Partner meetings whereby all Partners meet, due to the geographical spread this has proven to be a challenge.

The mission and values of RBLI strongly influence the way it operates, and as a result, opted to work with Partners who were aligned to their cause, which included a high level of commitment to equality and diversity. Prior to partnering arrangements commencing research was undertaken to establish previous experience of working with people with a wide range of disabilities, including physical, learning and mental health issues.

A Partner comment included:

*"Values are shared. We work to their model."*

Partners (interviewees involved in the design and procurement stages) confirmed that consideration was made to the mission and values of RBLI, and as a result, felt they were aligned to the overall purpose. In addition, their previous experience of working with people with a range of disabilities was assessed throughout the procurement process, and their commitment to equality and diversity was tested throughout due diligence.

A monthly review of performance at individual Partner and supply chain levels is undertaken by RBLI to establish whether there are sufficient resources in the current supply chain to deliver the services in line with the commissioner's expectations, as well as meeting the needs of customers. To date it is felt that the current supply chains, including the direct delivery is fit for purpose.

In the event of a Partner opting to leave a supply chain, contingency plans have been designed and would be mobilised, in the first instance to ensure customers were not affected RBLI would deliver the service, with a view to increasing the market share of current Partners or bring in an additional (named) Partner to join the supply chain.

## PRINCIPLE 2: Procure

The opportunity to partner with RBLI was promoted through a range of methods, for example, Employment Related Services Association (ERSA), a number of tendering portals, Google Ads, as well as direct contact. The EOI was released, which provided potential Partners with a range of information, including the background to RBLI and the overarching aims and objectives of the respective programme. A series of questions were posed, which were to be scored, in line with the published scoring mechanism, which provided transparency to the process. Partners (interviewees involved in the procurement stage) confirmed that support was available if required and communications were within the agreed timescales. Partners were advised of the outcome and next steps and those that were unsuccessful were given the opportunity to seek additional feedback. A Partner comment included:

*"Everything was explained, scoring, timescales, targets and expectations, due diligence was no different to any other."*

In the event of changes to the ownership of contracts, full consideration is made to the implications of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). A strategy for TUPE is in place which is underpinned by processes to ensure effective consultation and communication with staff potentially transferring in or out of the Organisation. The assessment team was advised that there had been no TUPE activity in the past year, and as a result the strategy was not tested; assurance was provided, that if applicable in the future the TUPE strategy would be mobilised.

The allocation of market share was based predominantly on previous presence / footprint in a specific area, for example, for Access to Work; Momentum in Scotland, 3SC in Wales, etc. Partners clearly understood the rationale of this allocation. In the case of RBLI being present in the same area, there were clear boundaries to ensure accurate allocation of the referral.

Partners were encouraged to share anticipated volumes, along with resources available to deliver the service at an early stage to provide RBLI with an indication of their capacity. Subsequently, in line with indicative numbers from the commissioner an indication of volumes was discussed and agreed. Similarly, funding / finance and performance expectations were discussed in line with those from the commissioner and agreed with Partners.

### PRINCIPLE 3: Contract

Contractual arrangements with Partners reflect the contracts imposed on RBLI by the relevant commissioner. The Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are a direct flow down of the Prime's obligations, and in turn Partners are aware of their contractual obligations and expectations. Partners are issued with a draft SLA for their review and subsequently RBLI work with them to ensure they understand and can manage all aspects of the contract. A Partner comment included:

*"As far as I can recall the SLA is fit for purpose."*

In the event of any changes following contract award and acceptance of the expectations and obligations these are discussed and agreed, and documentation prepared, if appropriate.

The SLA along with an Evidence Guide is provided to Partners at the set-up stage, which clearly indicates the performance expectations. On a weekly and monthly basis, performance is reviewed in line with the requirements, which provides Partners with a clear indication of what is expected of them in the ensuing weeks. A Partner comment included: *"Performance expectations are clearly communicated, and updates are provided. They are good in this respect."*

A complaints / appeals procedure is promoted to Partners, as well as the availability of an Independent Case Examiner (ICE). Partners confirmed their awareness of the procedures and felt confident to escalate a formal complaint / appeal, if the need arose.

At the time of the assessment there was no evidence of any formal complaints / appeals against RBLI from its Partners, as a result this process was not fully tested. Members of the senior leadership team stated that they would fully respect the decisions made as a result of third party mediation services, if it were to be deemed to have not acted in accordance with the principles of the Merlin Standard.

#### PRINCIPLE 4: Fund

Financial modelling was undertaken by RBLI to review the pricing structure and to ensure Partners were not put at undue financial risk. Partners were fully aware of the funding model for the respective contracts, and subsequently, this had been discussed prior to the signing of the contract. There was evidence of RBLI being flexible in their approach, as changes had been made to unit costs to ensure the contract was viable for Partners.

RBLI have set up systems and processes to enable Partners to submit evidence / documentation and an appropriate invoice in order to receive payment for the services provided. Whilst some Partners made reference to payments been slightly delayed, a large percentage confirmed that the 30days payment was honoured. Some Partner comments included:

*"Pretty sure we are paid on time or else my accounts team would be on to me."*

*"Paid timely yes – first quarter there was a delay."*

As previously stated, Partners delivering the Access to Work programme confirmed their understanding of single unit price payments to RBLI and in turn what was paid to them for the delivery of services. They recognised this was a management fee. Whilst Partners were aware of the support gained from RBLI to achieve the contractual expectations there was a lack of understanding in relation to the detail.

## PRINCIPLE 5: Develop

RBLI provide support to Partners to enable them to fulfil their contractual obligations from contract award throughout the life of the contracts. Policies and procedures are checked throughout the initial due diligence and subsequently reviewed annually; advice and guidance are available from the subject RBLI lead, if required to ensure these are fit for purpose. Similarly, if required information, advice and guidance is available in the event of a Partner having to apply TUPE.

At the start of each contract a guidance document is designed to provide Partners with a clear indication of the systems and processes, which is explained throughout a set-up meeting, and if required additional training provided to delivery staff. Throughout the life of the programme updates to the guidance are completed and communicated to the Partner. In the event of new resources, for example, the MARs database and online portal, a guidance document is prepared and shared with Partners, and training provided. A Partner comment included:

*"Had a lot of support and x went through the contract and provided a ring binder with everything in it. They have also reviewed the folders to ensure that the paper-based process is correct."*

RBLI recognise the importance of Partners not being reliant on one source of funding and as a result throughout due diligence seek to establish their financial stability and have assurance that other activities provide an income stream. Throughout the relationship opportunities to access different funding streams are promoted with the aim of building capacity and developing a range of services to enable them to remain viable and sustainable.

Partners have access to a range of learning and development activities throughout the life of the programmes, examples included 'Unlock', to support delivery staff to work with ex-offenders, a webinar to develop the skills and understanding to use the iCan Assessment Tool effectively through to refreshers for MyWorkSearch.

Those delivering the Access to Work programme have access to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) days whereby such topics as technical report writing, team building, equality and diversity and specific learning disabilities have been addressed, along with presentations relating to the latest equipment and technology for the industry. In the future, training will be provided on the MARs database and online reporting platform.

## PRINCIPLE 6: Performance Manage

Partners have a SPOC assigned to them, which is the first point of call for the Partner to seek information, advice, guidance, clarification, etc. However, other named contacts are available for Partners to address queries, for example, quality and compliance, referral allocation, finance, etc. A high proportion of Partners confirmed that RBLI staff were accessible and responsive, as well as provided them with the support required. A Partner comment included:

*"Staff are always available to support us."*

There have been some changes in staff due to a restructure within RBLI, and as a result, Partners are now starting to develop a relationship with the different people. In the main, communications are said to be open, honest and without unreasonable constraint. Those interviewees operating at a management level within the Partner confirmed that they were able to talk about anything and everything relating to the respective programme, and in turn felt RBLI staff were positive and supportive. Some Partner comments included:

*"Yes, to communication channels. X is very good, and the new team has settled in. There is a key contact who is very good at responding. There are others in the RBLI also who we can contact to get answers quickly."*

*"Easy to contact X who always provides a considered response."*

The weekly telephone calls with Partners provide the opportunity to review performance against key indicators and identify appropriate action to be taken to achieve these. The monthly performance review, consistently undertaken for the Access to Work programme, establishes the overall performance. In the case of the BBO programme performance reviews tend to be in proportion with the targets, but as a minimum these are quarterly whereby performance will be reviewed against the wider targets, for example, equality and diversity.

Once again, those interviews that took place with individuals operating at a management level confirmed that their assigned SPOC and others within RBLI are open to discuss issues and challenges, as well as recognising and supporting innovation.

A range of management information reporting mechanisms and assessment tools are used for both Access to Work and BBO to provide data to drive performance and support customer progression. Whilst the management information is available for Partners it was apparent that this wasn't been accessed and utilised to the full potential by some Partners.

The performance of Partners is closely monitored, and improvements encouraged and supported, for example, reference was made to poor reports been submitted by a Partner on the Access to Work programme, and as a result the SPOC worked closely with them and subsequently performance has improved.

The SPOC and others within RBLI identify and share practices observed throughout the life of the programmes to support Partners achieve the key performance indicators (KPIs) and provide a service to meet customer's needs. One example, was recommending Partners signpost customers to a specific service to overcome barriers to progression. A Partner comment included:

*"Given a few ideas on referrals e.g. women over a certain age – so at moment OK and we are where we should be."*

Whilst efforts have been made to arrange partnership meetings for Partners to attend within their respective supply chain, this has proven to be a challenge to date, but efforts continue to be made. This would further contribute to sharing practices and learning from each other.

As previously stated, the Access to Work programme is coming up to the one-year anniversary and there are plans to undertake a SAR, resulting in a QIP. The Big Lottery quarterly reporting of the Annex B provides a rolling review of successes and areas for improvement with the aim of addressing performance and quality assurance.

## PRINCIPLE 7: Quality Assurance and Compliance

Communication of updates to changes in regulatory and legislative requirements is made via email, and subsequently reviewed throughout the monthly performance review and / or annual due diligence activities. In the case of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) due to be effective at the end of May, RBLI have a planned communication strategy, and Partners will be expected to sign an agreement to confirm their understanding and implementation.

In terms of contractual changes these are either communicated by email and / or the SPOC, and subsequently discussed with the Partners to identify the impact and changes to be made to the guidance, systems and processes.

Quality assurance practices have been designed to ensure contractual compliance requirements are met and the quality of the delivery is monitored, including the customer experience. This includes a review of five new and five current customer files, per Partner, per month for the BBO programme; findings are documented and returned to the Partner for correction within a specific timescale. Examples of findings in the past included errors in completing documentation and gaining the correct type of evidence.

Similarly, within the Access to Work programme 20% of Partner's reports are quality assured per month, and again findings are reported. RBLI spoke of identifying a trend with a specific Partner, which resulted in a 100% quality assurance activity of reports, until improvements were made, and this has now been reduced to 20%.

The quality of service is monitored through customer feedback, whilst a high proportion of the feedback has been positive to date, areas for improvement are identified and addressed to contribute to providing the customer with a good experience, for example, streamlining a process.

RBLI is **matrix** accredited and undertake the annual continuous improvement checks, which provides a level of quality assurance regarding the information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided to customers and Partners. The SPOC utilises information received from reliable sources, for example, the commissioner. Leads within the Prime Organisation take responsibility for specific topics, for example, health and safety, data security, safeguarding, TUPE, etc. and as a result provide appropriate IAG, which is current and accurate, as and when required.

A technical expert is on call within RBLI to provide advice and guidance regarding the reports prepared and submitted for the Access to Work programme. As previously stated, a minimum of 20% of Partner reports are quality assured to ensure they meet the criteria, and a review of the information and advice is included.

In the future, RBLI have plans to complete observations of practice, which is encouraged.

The annual due diligence relating to policies and procedures for data security, health and safety, safeguarding and environmental sustainability ensures these reflect changes in legislative and regulatory requirements and that they continue to be fit for purpose.

The annual risk assessments and site visits review the practices for data security, health and safety and safeguarding, and provide assurance that policies and procedures are being implemented. As previously stated, the quarterly report submitted to The Big Lottery summarises performance against a range of requirements, including equality and diversity and environmental sustainability. A Partner comment included:

*"All policies are in place and checked. Recently checked and sent over to RBLI for confirmation."*

The senior leadership team are aware of the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 however, this is currently not applicable to RBLI. The Act is not applicable to the present Partners, as a result this was not fully tested throughout the assessment. In the future, due diligence activities will identify whether the Act is relevant to Partner organisations.

## PRINCIPLE 8: Review and Close

RBLI actively engage in a range of external audits and assessments, which has subsequently informed improvements to practices, these include; Investors in People, **matrix**, Investors in Diversity, etc. These inform action plans, which are reviewed and updated annually, as a minimum. It was noted that RBLI was positive in its approach to the assessment against the Merlin standard and valued the verbal feedback at the end of the process.

RBLI prepare and publish an annual Social Impact Report, which is available through printed material, as well as on the website. It is shared with key stakeholders and accessible to the general public. The 2016/17 Report provides many examples of how it has contributed to reducing the disability gap and promotes the fact that in the past three years there has been an increase of over 600,000 people with a range of disabilities enter the work place. Some Partner comments included:

*"The wider social objectives that we are setting out to achieve in helping people into work is relevant."*

*"They relate to the purpose of the contract. That is, working with people to enable a journey to employment ultimately."*

Numerous case studies are included in the Social Impact Report demonstrating the positive impact the services provided have had on individual's lives, citing examples such as gaining independence, increasing self-confidence, self-worth and general health and wellbeing through to being less reliant on benefits.

As previously stated, the LEPs have priorities regarding the target groups which is monitored. The data collected relating to equal opportunities is analysed and utilised to inform future promotional activities to attract different customer groups, for example, male participants, women 50plus, etc.

The RBLI has outlined the conditions and procedures required to close and / or terminate a contract, which are fully outlined in the SLA. This includes the sharing and handover of relevant files and documents to ensure the commissioner's requirements are met. Partners were aware of where the information could be accessed, if required.

## 9. CONCLUSION AND CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

In conclusion, this assessment provided the opportunity to review the practices of RBLI for the current contracts against the Merlin Standard. The senior leadership team should be mindful that any significant organisational or senior staff changes, and / or being awarded additional contracts using a significantly different supply chain may require a strategic review. Similarly, any decisions reached by the Independent Complaints Examiner may also result in a strategic review being required to ensure the Organisation continues to operate in line with the Merlin principles.

### Holders of the Merlin Standard Accreditation must:

- Maintain and continually improve upon their approach to Supply Chain Management.
- Cooperate with annual Reviews as required by Assessment Services Ltd
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd ([merlin@assessmentservices.com](mailto:merlin@assessmentservices.com)) or their Lead Assessor if the key contact name or contact details change.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email:
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd immediately if they gain additional contracts.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received from Supply Chain Partners.
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services Ltd and/or the Merlin Standard to be brought into disrepute.
- Only use the Merlin Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines.
- Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for Accreditation Review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by Assessment Services Ltd and do not display the Merlin Standard Quality Mark, nor refer to being a former holder of the Merlin Standard.
- Be aware that Assessment Services Ltd reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.
- Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the Merlin Standard at least 4 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment, completion of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), Pre-Assessment Notes (PAN) and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 2 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.

	
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